What Came After:
Figurative Painting in Chicago 1978–1998
Organized by Phyllis Bramson

Nicolas Africano
Phyllis Bramson
Susanne Doremus
Richard Hull
Michiko Itatani
Paul Lamantia
Robert Lostutter
Jim Lutes
Tony Phillips
David Sharpe
Hollis Sigler
Eleanor Spiess-Ferris
Ken Warneke
Margaret Wharton
Mary Lou Zelazny

This exhibition and program guide is in memory of James Yood (1952–2018)

September 14, 2019–January 12, 2020

ELMHURST ART MUSEUM
What Came After is organized in conjunction with a new installation across Elmhurst's museum campus at Elmhurst College's A.C. Buehler Library. This display was organized by Suellen Rocca, one of the original members of the Hairy Who and current Curator and Director of Exhibitions at Elmhurst College. She will give tours of the internationally recognized Chicago Imagist collection and give first-person accounts of Chicago's cultural history, while also providing context and furthering the dialogue about art from Chicago during the 1970s to 1990s.

Sponsored by the Explore Elmhurst Grant Program, with public programming sponsored by Terra Foundation for American Art. Additional support from the Herman and Esther Halperin family, Zolla/Lieberman Gallery in honor of James Yood, and Jim Gillespie in honor of Judy Gillepsie.

The organizer would like to especially acknowledge Lal Bahcecioglu, Manager of Exhibitions and Collections at the Elmhurst Art Museum, and Lynne Warren for editing this program guide.

Our deepest gratitude to the collectors who lent work for this exhibition:

Carl Hammer Gallery
The Elmhurst College Art Collection
Vicki Granacki and Lee Wesley
Illinois State Museum
Private Collection, courtesy of Jean Albano Gallery
William Lieberman Collection
Paddor Trust
Rockford Art Museum
The Ruttenberg '52 Collection
David and Judith Sensibar
Eric Thompson
Annette Turow
William Lieberman Gallery
Cindy Bernhard - program guide designer

John McKinnon - Executive Director
Joseph Hladik - Director of Education and Grants Administrator
Julie Rosenberg - Manager of Exhibitions and Collections
Jenn Guistosile - Manager of Community Outreach and Special Events
Monica Fichter - Manager of Member Services and Visitor Experience
JoAnn Concaldi - Senior Visitor Services Associate
Pamela Lyons - Visitor Services Associate/Volunteer Coordinator
Colm Fitzpatrick - Education Programs Intern
Celina Wu - Curatorial Intern

Acknowledgments

John McKinnon, Executive Director

The Elmhurst Art Museum is deeply committed to showing the work of Midwestern artists, so we are thrilled to dig deeper into Chicago’s rich cultural history through the exhibition What Came After: Figurative Painting in Chicago 1978-1998 and its accompanying program. These efforts build on an ongoing conversation about Chicago Imagism, which has become broadly and internationally known, but remains often misunderstood.

The survey exhibition, robust complementary programs, and this program guide present the artists’ voices as well as scholarship by curators and writers—made possible through the support of the Terra Foundation for American Art for which we are thankful. It was through the leadership and vision of artist Phyllis Bramson that this project came to be, and to her we are most grateful. She organized the show, shaped the public lectures, and put together the following texts, all with the goal of providing insight into work produced in Chicago that heretofore has been largely underappreciated. We are thankful to the artists as well as many lenders to the exhibition who helped in furthering this dialogue, as well as the many participants in tours, talks, and other educational activities.

Several critical voices have been integral to examining the legacy of the Chicago Imagists and beyond, including curator Lynne Warren and curator/critic Deven Golden. In their texts, the term “Chicago Imagism” is discussed as valuable, yet limiting. Warren’s essay “Despise Imagism” will help lead numerous discussions at our public programs. This topic will be addressed in talks by including that by curator Bob Conzolin, who will ask “What if we purged ‘Imagist’ and ‘Imagism’ from how we organize and think about Chicago art?” Lastly, the important contributions by the late art critic James Yood, whose memory the exhibition is dedicated to, is referenced in a chart that delineates stylistic differences within the Chicago School. Yood helped define Chicago art through his dedication to Chicago artists, leaving a legacy that surely will continue to be examined for years to come.

We are also thankful for the strong partnership of Elmhurst College, which has helped to enrich our endeavor. Artist and curator Suellen Rocca worked with us to pair What Came After with a newly installed collection display at the A.C. Buehler Library. The College’s art collection, primarily focused on the Chicago Imagists, is an extraordinary asset of Elmhurst which also allows for a wider cultural exchange.

The exhibition What Came After is generously sponsored by the Explore Elmhurst Grant Program. It is complemented by a host of public programs as well as this guide thanks to the support of the Terra Foundation for American Art. Without their generosity, this project would not have been possible.

At the Elmhurst Art Museum, the entire museum has been involved in this initiative, which includes our staff, art preparators, docents, volunteers, and others such as our Teen Art Council. Our combined efforts, along with that of the numerous artists, lenders, scholars, sponsors, partners, and others all help the museum inspire its community. I’m deeply indebted to everyone’s collaboration, goodwill, and dedication.
Despite Imagism: Chicago’s Rich Figurative Tradition
Lyne Warren

Ever since “Imagism” was first applied to Chicago painters who emerged in the 1960s, the term has been rather freely used to describe any colorful, seemingly playful, distorted figurative style of image-making by Chicago-based artists. Thus the figurative artists who “came after” those initially labeled Imagists—that is, artists who emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s—were referred to as the Chicago Imagists, an unfortunate association with Imagism has helped sustain the careers of some through more frequent exhibition, especially in museums. But one can’t help but think, “what might have been for the ‘what came after’ artists if Chicago had been a little less reliant on Imagism as the marker for important Chicago art and more open to the ‘Chicago School’ as a more inclusive term which examined the varieties of figurative work—from the highly abstracted paintings of Bramson, Wharton, and Zelazny to the attenuated, frenetic collapsing of figurative work—from the highly abstracted paintings of Bramson, Wharton, and Zelazny to the attenuated, frenetic collapsing of figurative work—from the highly abstracted paintings of Bramson, Wharton, and Zelazny to the attenuated, frenetic collapsing of figurative work—from the highly abstracted paintings of Bramson, Wharton, and Zelazny to the attenuated, frenetic collapsing of figurative work—against modern and vernacular sources of the Imagists, those who came influenced by di...
The Last Wave: Figurative Painting in Chicago at the End of the 20th Century

Deven Golden

"The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." —L.P. Hartley

This exhibition features 15 artists who came to attention in Chicago over 40 years ago and, if we are to understand them properly, we must first lay out both the place and times in which they emerged. Even for those of us who lived it, it is hard to remember now how very different Chicago was in the late 1970s—less tall and shiny downtown, more a grid of grittily, heavily segregated neighborhoods. The buoyant optimism that had defined most of the 1960s had become undone by the end of the decade through a series of horrible events—the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, the 1968 Democratic Convention and police riots, the Chicago Seven trial, and then Watergate—that had left a darkened culture in their wake. It is not surprising, therefore, that the artists who developed during this time, and who are the focus of this exhibition, often display imagery significantly more fraught than the artists who came before.

And while we acknowledge and reference the Chicago artists whose exhibition "came after", it is also important to our understanding to remember how exceedingly localized culture was at this time. Artists developed their ideas submerged in a dialogue with the artists and artwork they could actually see. For although this was to irrevocably change during the time period covered by this exhibition, at the time the artists in What Came After: Figurative Painting in Chicago 1978–1998 were emerging, art magazines and globe trotting collectors had not yet made art an international commodity. More significantly, the Internet, which for good or bad eventually destroyed all sense of locality by the new millennium, was in 1978 still only an idea circulating among a roomful of people at DARPA[1]. In short, while we were at the cusp of the world we live in today, art movements in the 1970s were still for the most part generated locally, and people would often refer to them in that way: the San Francisco Bay Area artists, the London School, the New York School, and of course, the Chicago School, which thanks to art critic Franz Schulze's 1972 book Fantastic Image: Chicago Art Since 1945, is known by many today as Chicago Imagism.

Aesthetically, and despite its being well documented, many people can still find Chicago Imagism to be a vague concept. This might be because our attention is drawn to the eclecticism of the individual artists rather than the underlying ideas informing their work. Or perhaps it is because we mistakenly take one of the smaller groups, such as the Hairy Who, to represent the entire rather than seeing the larger picture. Or maybe it is simply because the Chicago School's strong emphasis on developing a unique personal imagery interferes with our standard notions of identifying groups. Whatever the reasons, the general lack of clarity concerning the underlying philosophy requires that we take a moment to understand what ideas the artists in this current show share among themselves as well as the Chicago artists they followed.

Let's start with two big and intertwined ideas of the Chicago School: art should be accessible and have something to say to everyday people and that, true to the American ideal, stories about the lives of these people are worth telling. This is an anti-élite narrative, one interested in the travails and inner life of individuals. What follows from this is a general avoidance of pure abstraction in favor of more accessible representational images, most often figures. That the images created are nonetheless abstracted, often heavily so, reflects these artists' view of the artwork as a form of psychological portraiture, reflecting on both the subject and the maker: This, in turn, leads to a belief that development of a unique vision is critical. Drawing, with its intimacy, directness, and approachability, is understood to be the simplest way to realize the artist's personal vision. The combination of these ideas—accessibility, psychology, individuality, and intimacy—is the bright thread weaving through the works of the post-WWII Chicago School. This includes, among others, the first generation, known as the Monster Roster, comprised of the artists H.C. Westermann, Leon Golub, June Leaf, Evelyn Statsinger, Nancy Spero, Irving Perl in, Cosmo Campoli, Dominick Di Meo, Don Baum, and Seymour Rosofsky. It includes the second-generation artists of the sixties who, organized into shows by Don Baum at the Hyde Park Art Center, comprised of the artists Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Jim Falconer, Suellen Rocca, Karl Witsum, Roger Brown, Ed Paschke, Christina Ramberg, Barbara Rossi, Phil Hanson, Ed Flood, Ray Yoshinobu, and Carolee Casanight, and the artists in What Came After, whom despite their differences are, like their predecessors, involved in the same Chicago School conversation.

So even as we appreciate that the artists in What Came After are individuals on their own path, we can also be cognizant of this larger dialogue in which they are all participants. Hollis Sigler, who came to The School of The Art Institute of Chicago MFA program as a photo-realist, found in the Chicago School the tools to reject that style completely in pursuit of a deceptively primitive technique and dream-like subject matter with a decidedly female perspective. A female perspective, albeit with very different visual vocabularies, informs the works of Phyllis Bramson, whose cast of silent actors and assembled objects appear engaged in some eternal Noh play, and Eleanor Spiess-Ferris, whose surreal compositions speak of disappointment and loss. Continuing the work of her grandmother, Mary Lou Zelazny, whose identity of the character depicted is defined as much by their materialistic desires as it is by their shadowy visages. Fragmentation is also a subtext, along with allusions to facades and hidden identities, in the mute partial portraits of Ken Warneke. Going a step further, seeming to dissolve in toto the distinction between personhood and object, Margaret Wharton completely dismembers wooden chairs only to reassemble them into fanciful personages that, while evoking a clear psychic identity, never lose their previous utilitarian identity fully behind.

To a lesser or greater extent, then, the 15 individuals in this exhibition represent a cross-section of the large group of artists working in Chicago to incorporate and synthesize the ideas of the Chicago School, or break free from its perceived constraints, even as the very idea of local movements was, with the approaching new century, coming to an end. That all of the works in What Came After: Figurative Painting in Chicago 1978–1998 appear as vital and rewarding today as they did when they were made tells us something about the strength of art. That the time they were made, although well within the lifetime of many of us, now appears so very distant tells us something about ourselves.

Lostutter, who merges the intimacy of drawing with a high-temperature painting palette, and addresses themes similar to Africano, subtly references the work of Richard Lindner, whose formal inventiveness and sexual overtess makes him another touchstone for the Chicago School.

Indeed, one can again see hints of Lindner, along with an architectonic approach to composition that brings to mind second generation Imagist Roger Brown, in the more geometrically abstract work of Richard Hull, who makes use of a wax ground to highlight the touch granted by drawing in his own paintings. Incorporating the psychology afforded by formal abstraction is a major component of Hull's work, as it is to differing degrees in the paintings of David Sharpe, who manages to pay homage to both Miró and Giotto in his playful yet mysterious tableaux. Increasing the role of abstract imagery in their works, but without abandoning the figure, we find Paul Lamantia's hallucinatory sceneries of wanont abandon writ large, and Jim Lutes' hapless down-and-out protagonists struggling to maintain their own existence. The figure is nearly, but not quite, lost altogether in the overall nether space abstractions of Susanne Doremus, who makes discreet use of hand-cut linoleum stamps for paint application to increase the viewer's awareness of the artist's touch, while Michiko Tatanai places her figures, colossi in battle against themselves, in an atomized realm that seems to be more phantom-zone than landscape.

The figure remains, but the integrity of the body is called into question in the hybrid painting/collages of Mary Lou Zelazny, where the identity of the characters depicted is defined as much by their materialistic desires as it is by their shadowy visages. Fragmentation is also a subtext, along with allusions to facades and hidden identities, in the mute partial portraits of Ken Warneke. Going a step further, seeming to dissolve in toto the distinction between personhood and object, Margaret Wharton completely dismembers wooden chairs only to reassemble them into fanciful personages that, while evoking a clear psychic identity, never lose their previous utilitarian identity fully behind.

[1] The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) is an agency of the United States Department of Defense responsible for the development of emerging technologies for use by the military.
Nicolas Africano
*Myself Was Taken From Me*, 1983
The Ruttenberg '52 Collection

Phyllis Bramson
*Acts of Ardor*, 1984
The Elmhurst College Art Collection

checklist no. 1
checklist no. 3
Susanne Doremus
*Landscape with Fern*, 1983
Courtesy of the artist and Zolla/Lieberman Gallery

Richard Hull
*Ding Dong*, 1982
Collection of Eric Thompson

checklist no. 5

checklist no. 7
Michiko Itatani
*Untitled from High-point Contact A-2*, 1991
Lent by the artist
checklist no. 9

Paul Lamantia
*False Prophets*, 1991
Lent by the artist
checklist no. 11
Robert Lostutter
*Starlings in Late Afternoon*, 1986
Illinois Legacy Collection, Illinois State Museum,
Partners in Purchase-Illinois Arts Council and Dart Gallery, Chicago

checklist no. 13

Jim Lutes
*Desert Boy*, 1995
William Lieberman Collection

checklist no. 15
Tony Phillips
*Through the Looking Glass*, 1995
Collection of David and Judith Sensibar
checklist no. 17

Hollis Sigler
*Comes the Day of Reckoning*, 1985
Collection of Vicki Granacki and Lee Wesley
checklist no. 19
David Sharpe  
*The Bath, 1981*  
Courtesy: Paddor Trust  
checklist no. 21

Eleanor Spiess-Ferris  
*Plastic Pears, 1984*  
Lent by the artist  
checklist no. 23
Ken Warneke
*Untitled (P. R. II)*, 1996
Courtesy of Carl Hammer Gallery
checklist no. 25

Margaret Wharton
*General Nonsense*, 1981
Private Collection, Courtesy of Jean Albano Gallery
checklist no. 27
Exhibition Checklist

1. Nicolas Africano (American, b. 1948)
   Myself Hour: Taken from Me, 1980
   Acrylic, oil, and tempera on canvas, 48 x 84 in.
  Courtesy of the artist and Carl Hammer Gallery

2. Nicolas Africano (American, b. 1948)
   Shadows/Thresholds, 1979–81
   Acrylic and oil on mounted etched canvas, overall: 36 x 36 in.
   The Hudson Art College Art Collection

3. Phyllis Bramson (American, b. 1941)
   Acts of Eden, 1986
   Oil on canvas, 45 x 72 x 2 in.
   The Elmhurst Art College Art Collection

4. Phyllis Bramson (American, b. 1941)
   Decade, 1990
   Oil on canvas, 60 x 52 in.
   Courtesy of the artist and Carl Hammer Gallery

5. Summer Damon (American, b. 1945)
   Landscape with Fox, 1985
   Oil, graphite, oil stick on canvas, 51 x 48 in.
   Courtesy of the artist and Carl Hammer Gallery

6. Summer Damon (American, b. 1945)
   Apron, 1996
   Mixed media on canvas, 72 x 60 in.
   Courtesy of the artist and Carl Hammer Gallery

7. Richard Hall (American, b. 1955)
   Dog Rush, 2005
   Oil and wax ground on canvas, 72 x 48 in.
   Collection of Eric Thompson

8. Richard Hall (American, b. 1955)
   Last of the Dudes, 2005
   Oil and wax ground on canvas, 66 x 48 in.
   Collection Richard Kohno, Museum, Alhambra, CA, Gift of Leonard and Joanna Simon

9. Melchior Etan (American, b. in Japan, 1982)
   Untitled (High-Paint Contact), 2001
   Oil and wax ground on canvas, 56 x 78 in.
   Lent by the artist

10. Melchior Etan (American, b. in Japan, 1982)
    Untitled (High-Paint Contact), 2001
    Oil on canvas, 72 x 48 in.
    Courtesy of the artist and Carl Hammer Gallery

11. Paul Lamantia (American, b. 1938)
    Acts of Ardor, 1984
    Oil on canvas, 100 x 78 in.
    Collection of Annette Turow, Courtesy of Jean Albano Gallery

12. Paul Lamantia (American, b. 1938)
    False Prophets, 1982
    Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in.
    Collection of Rockford Art Museum, Illinois, USA, Gift of Frances and June Spirn

13. Robert Lostutter (American, b. 1939)
    Starlings in Late Afternoon, 1985
    Oil on canvas, 66 x 75 in.
    Lent by the artist

14. Robert Lostutter (American, b. 1939)
    Hollywood Sacrifice, 1991
    Oil on canvas, 60 1/2 x 70 1/4 in.
    Courtesy Carl Hammer Gallery

15. Jim Lutes (American, b. 1955)
    Desert Boy, 1995
    Egg tempera on canvas, 48 x 72 in.
    Collection of Vern and June Spirn

    The Deposition, 1990
    Oil on canvas, 74 x 74 in.
    Collection of Rockford Art Museum, Illinois

17. Tony Phillips (American, b. 1977)
    Through a Looking Glass, 1995
    Oil on canvas, 74 x 74 in.
    Collection of David and Judith Sundfair

18. Tony Phillips (American, b. 1977)
    The Spider Eats, 1995
    Oil on canvas, 48 x 72 in.
    Lent by the artist

    Comes the Day of Reckoning, 1989
    Oil on canvas with painted frame, 72 x 60 in.
    Collection of Vicky Frensina and Lee Wesley

    A Recipe for Going, 1991–92
    Oil on canvas with painted frame, 72 x 60 in.
    Collection of Rockford Art Museum, Illinois, USA, Gift of Frances and June Spirn

21. David Sharp (American, b. 1941)
    The Jents, 1991
    Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in.
    Courtesy: Fendall Trust

22. David Sharp (American, b. 1941)
    Untitled, 1980
    Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in.
    Courtesy Carl Hammer Gallery

23. Eleanor Spiess-Ferris (American, b. 1941)
    Plastic Pearls, 1986
    Oil on canvas, 72 x 72 in.
    Lent by the artist

24. Eleanor Spiess-Ferris (American, b. 1941)
    Dust, 1988
    Oil on canvas, 72 x 36 in.
    Lent by the artist

25. Ken Manasse (American, b. 1948)
    Untitled (R.A.), 1996
    Oil and acrylic on panel, 14 x 18 in.
    Courtesy of Carl Hammer Gallery

26. Ken Manasse (American, b. 1948)
    Untitled (A.A.), 1996
    Oil and acrylic on panel, 14 x 18 in.
    Courtesy of Carl Hammer Gallery

27. Margaret Wharton (American, 1943–2014)
    General Bernard, 1983
    Oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in.
    Private Collection, Courtesy of Jann Allen Gallery

    Zephyrs, 1992
    Mixed media, mixed papers, 76 x 52 x 47 in.
    Collections of Maria Toursi, Courtesy of Jann Allen Gallery

29. Mary Lou Zelazny (American, b. 1956)
    The Bath, 1995
    Oil on canvas with painted frame, 53 x 66 in.
    Gift of Francis and June Spirn

30. Mary Lou Zelazny (American, b. 1956)
    The Endless Task, 1991
    Acrylic, oil, collage on canvas, 60 x 38 in.
    Courtesy of the artist and Carl Hammer Gallery

Mary Lou Zelazny
The Slumber Party, 1991
Courtesy of the artist and Carl Hammer Gallery

checklist no. 29
Public Programs

Public programs sponsored by the Terra Foundation for American Art. All events free with museum admission.

Panel Discussion: Despite Imagism
Saturday, September 14 | 1:30 PM
Presenters include artist Phyllis Bramson, curator Lynne Warren, curator/critic Deven Golden, and artists Richard Hall, Susanne Doremus, and Jim Lutes.

Family Day
Saturday, September 28 | 1–4 PM
Children and parents are invited to participate in hands-on activities inspired by the current exhibition. Available to all ages.

Family Day
Monday, October 14 | 1:30 PM
Children and parents are invited to participate in hands-on activities inspired by the current exhibition. Available to all ages.

Tour of Elmhurst College's Chicago Imagist collection with Suellen Rocca
Saturday, October 19 | 1:30 PM
See the newly reinstalled Elmhurst College Chicago Imagist collection with an exclusive tour by Suellen Rocca, one of the original members of the Hairy Who and current Curator and Director of Exhibitions at Elmhurst College.

Lecture: What is Chicago Imagism?
Saturday, November 2 | 1:30 PM
Join us for a talk about Chicago Imagism and its legacy by art critic, curator, and essayist Deven Golden. This talk will look at the artist dialogue that led up to this period, what followed, and how things irrevocably changed as the 20th century came to an end.

Tour of Elmhurst College's Chicago Imagist collection with Suellen Rocca
Saturday, November 9 | 1:30 PM
See the newly reinstalled Elmhurst College Chicago Imagist collection with an exclusive tour by Suellen Rocca, one of the original members of the Hairy Who and current Curator and Director of Exhibitions at Elmhurst College.

Lecture: Against Imagism
Saturday, November 23 | 1:30 PM
Curator Robert Cozzolino will address questions such as: Where did the Imagist term come from? What has it done? What if we purged “imagist” and “imagism” from how we organize and think about Chicago art?

Exhibition Tour
Saturday, January 11 | 1:30 PM
Led by Phyllis Bramson the organizer of What Came After: Figurative Painting in Chicago 1978–1998

IMAGISM

cool, ironic
detached, humorous
analytical

NEW PAINTING

emotional immediacy
committed, involved
introspective, moral seriousness

TECHNIQUE

linear
flatly painted
scrupulous finish
attention to detail
calculated; idea precedes process

painterly
textural; scumbled, malerisch
records process of creation
purposeful ambiguity
evolves, receptive to accident, chance effects

CONTENT/ THEMES

social
contemporary urban life
images from popular culture
sex, violence, menace

personal
primal fears, anxieties, impulses and desires
mythic, autobiographical images
sex, violence, menace

COMPOSITION

closed
emphasis on pattern
decorative appeal
scale of figures small in relation to picture area

open
emphasis on painterly effects
primitivity of emotion
figure fills picture area

SPACE

claustrophobic, flattened

expansive, infinite recession

SETTING

specific, identifiable
man-made, architecturally defined

non-referential, ambiguous
nature; occasional introduction landscape elements

COLOR

light palette, dominated by primaries
color areas circumscribed by line

dark palette, dominated by neutrals
color areas loosely described
